

INTRODUCTION

This is a short guide to setting up a language club. Of course, circumstances will vary from village to city and country to country but we hope there is enough information here to show you how you can adapt to your own context and get started. We would love to hear how you get on – join the WELCOME network and follow our website and social media for more ideas and information.

Good luck from the WELCOME team!

YOUR LANGUAGE CLUB

Getting started

What is the purpose of a Language Club?

Language Learning Clubs are friendly and supportive places for people who speak little or none of the language of the country they live in. They enable people to practise and improve their spoken language skills in groups of 8-12 for a few hours each week. Importantly, Clubs encourage learners to take part in their local communities and progress to more formal language learning when they are ready.

There are examples of different language clubs on the WELCOME website

Where can Clubs be located?

Clubs are based in the community
– for example: libraries, schools
and pre-schools, places of worship,
cafes – even outdoors in parks and
markets.

Who can attend?

The Clubs are specifically designed for those who speak only a little or even none of the language of the country they are currently living in. Some Clubs may be created for specific groups – e.g. women

Who runs the Clubs?

A club is co-ordinated by a coach usually based in a community organisation. Often they are volunteers. Coaches do not need to be professional teachers but they do need to read and understand the guidance on this website.



How many people can attend?

We have found that Language Clubs work best with 8-12 people, meeting for 2-3 hours each week but you can meet with fewer people for a longer or shorter time – it really depends on the individual group – they're all different. We recommend 2+ coaches for groups with more than 12 learners.

Is a lot of money needed to set up a club?

No. Providing you can find a quiet and secure space so people can hear each other you can start a club. They can work successfully in markets, nursery

schools, libraries, faith centres and other community organisations.

Of course though, a few resources are useful. You may decide you need all or some of the following:

-  Flipchart and markers
-  Some language [learning activities](#)
-  Pens and paper for the group
-  Laptop/tablet with access to the Internet
-  Smartphones with access to the Internet
-  Photocopying facility
-  Access to refreshments
-  Audio/camera/video (usually on a smartphone)

Role of the Language Club Coach

Coaches come from wide range of backgrounds and experiences - community workers, recent graduates, teachers and teaching assistants, project managers, care workers, parents and former language learners from migrant communities.

Coaches are responsible for:

Planning and delivering language learning activities; working with their learners to identify their needs and goals; signposting learners to more advanced language learning.

Liaising with staff at the organisation hosting the Club (e.g. session times, facilities, communicating with learners, organizing access to resources and refreshments ...)

The health and safety of the learners while they are at the Club. This means making sure that any activity they carry out complies with the health and safety policy of the organisation hosting the Club.

Approach

We use facilitation and coaching rather than formal teaching methods.

What is facilitation?

Facilitation focuses on how people participate in the process of learning, not just on what is achieved. The facilitator's role is to guide, not take the lead, and to draw out ideas and opinions without taking sides. Some learners who are used to more formal teaching methods may resist a facilitative approach at first because they expect someone to take charge of the group.

How can I encourage participation?

-  Create an open and supportive atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable participating
-  Acknowledge individual ideas and decisions
-  Develop a structure that allows for everyone's ideas to be heard
-  Use praise to make learners feel positive about their contribution to the meeting.

Why are facilitation skills so important?

-  Good facilitation skills are essential to keep learners engaged and to help them become more confident. The more you know about how to facilitate an excellent Club session, the more your members will feel empowered to share their ideas and play an active part in the group.

Before a session

-  Check the environment – is the location comfortable, accessible and the right size for the group?
-  Logistics – arrange chairs in a circle to encourage discussion, provide refreshments (if available), and check on any audio-visual equipment before the session.
-  Do you have all the resources you need for the learning activities?

Delivering a session

-  Start the meeting on time
-  Welcome everyone
-  Make introductions
-  Start with an ice breaker
-  Ground rules – encourage the group to develop their own ground rules, for example on allowing each other to speak and timekeeping.
-  Review the agenda and ground rules for each session
-  Encourage participation from everyone in the group
-  **Be aware of the mood of the group** If the group looks bored, is starting to shift in their seats, look restless or confused, speed up or slow down the pace of the session, or take a break.
-  **Be aware of your own body language** Be careful that you're not repeating yourself, saying "um" between words, or speaking too fast. Take a break if you feel nervous or feel like you are losing control. Walk around the room rather than stand in one position facing the group.
-  Bring closure to each section of the session as necessary
-  Respect everyone's rights and opinions and don't judge
-  Address any behaviour or stop any conversation which is disrespectful or intimidating, racist, sexist, homophobic or discriminates in any way against any member of the group
-  Be flexible if an activity isn't working, or if it needs more time
-  Thank learners at the end of each session.

Some tips

-  There should be more learner talk than teacher talk!
-  Don't let more confident members of the group dominate.
-  Give people time to think as they prepare to speak– don't leap to fill uncomfortable silences.
-  Discuss and compare the structure of different languages; point out that speakers of languages with alphabets eg Arabic, Bengali, Bulgarian face an additional challenge when learning a language with a Roman script.
-  Highlight good and interesting use of language as it occurs so that everyone benefits.

Some tips for working with diverse groups of learners

The learners in your Language Clubs will be coming from very different places - language

skills, experience and quite literally from other countries and cultures. The importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity cannot be underestimated and good facilitation practice can help ensure that all group members are respected and empowered.

-  **Be aware of the feelings of individuals:** establishing and maintaining an atmosphere of trust and respect requires an awareness of how people are responding to both activities and discussion topics, and the reactions of other people in the group. Noting when people are becoming quieter or more withdrawn is essential. Sensing how an individual is feeling and responding appropriately is a critical facilitation skill.
-  **Be aware of the chemistry of the group:** being sensitive and responsive to the group's dynamic is essential to skilled facilitation. Note that this may very well change from session to session, so it's important to take regular sense checks to assess how the group is, and react accordingly if they are tired, energetic, anxious or bored.
-  **Remember the importance of active listening:** active listening is essential to understand how people are feeling and what is important to them. Truly effective listening picks up on both the explicit meaning of words and also their implicit meaning and tone.
-  **Step in tactfully:** sometimes as a facilitator you may have to say difficult things for the good of the group. The ability to do so carefully and kindly is critical, especially if the issue is sensitive and/or related to an individuals' cultural background. You will need particular tact in dealing with emotional situations respectfully but, where necessary, firmly too.
-  **Develop an excellent sense of timing:** You will develop awareness of when to bring a discussion to a close, when to change the topic, when to cut off someone who has talked too long, when to let the discussion run over, and when to let the silence continue a little longer. This is very important when emotive or sensitive topics are being discussed. Be prepared to be flexible.
-  **Celebrate the group's diversity:** A good facilitator will recognise that each group is **as** different as the learners who make it up, and that this brings with it a wealth of interesting ideas for activities and discussions. Approach cultural differences in a very positive way, by taking an interest in each individual's background and providing opportunities for learners to talk to the group about their background.
-  **Be careful how much you focus on highlighting cultural differences.** There is a strong argument that it is equally important to focus learners' attention on

the cultural similarities within a group and community, emphasising common interests and values and promoting harmony.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding essentially means protecting people's health, wellbeing, safety and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect. It is fundamental to creating high- quality services for people, and it is an essential part of planning a language club.

The key principles of safeguarding, as set out by the UK government, include:

Empowerment: presumption of person led decisions and informed consent.

Protection: support and representation for those in greatest need.

Prevention: it is better to take action before harm occurs.

Proportionality: proportionate and least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented.

Partnership: local solutions through services working with their communities. Communities have a part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse.

Accountability: accountability and transparency in delivering safeguarding..

Some tips for creating a successful Club

These tips are from Speaking English with Confidence, a project that worked with over 7000 migrants and refugees in London from 2013-2015.

-  Learners are at the centre of the process – find out from them what they need and how they learn best.
-  Use resources and examples that are specific to your local area or to a cultural community (e.g. local walks, trips to specific shops/libraries/museums).
-  Invite people from the local community in to talk to learners.
-  Encourage learners to bring in their own resources (e.g. family photos, pictures from home, newspaper articles, ornaments, clothes/fabric ...).
-  Give learners opportunities to express themselves creatively e.g. through drama, drawing, poetry and storytelling.
-  Ask learners questions about their lives and interests but be sensitive –some may be shy or have distressing experiences they do not want to discuss.
-  Encourage as much discussion as possible and don't correct every little mistake - the most important thing is to improve confidence and encourage more advanced learning at a formal class.
-  A successful Club is sociable and fun:
 - If possible, schedule time at the beginning and end of sessions for learners to chat to each other
 - Focus on activities that encourage maximum interaction and ask volunteers to arrange extra social occasions for the group.
 - Be flexible, drop activities that fail, and pursue those that resonate with the group. If they find something to talk about that you hadn't planned on – let them take control of the topic and see where it goes.

THE LEARNERS

Initial assessment and enrolment

Anyone is free to attend the WELCOME language clubs but if learners wish to receive a certificate and record of their progress, they need to enrol with the club and provide some very basic information about themselves and their current language skills.

You can download a simple form from the WELCOME website to enrol learners and help to assess their current language skills.

Progress tracking

Attached to the enrolment and initial assessment forms on the WELCOME website are 2 more simple forms to help learners measure their progress mid-way and at the end of the course.

Learners that register with the club and complete the course will receive a record of their progress and a certificate of completion.

Exit plan & signposting

When a learner has finished, s/he may want to discuss their future language learning plans and goals. All clubs should build up a directory of local resources e.g. other language courses leading to qualifications at colleges and community organisations – you can use the Forum on this website to post and exchange information, too.

It is not the role of the club coach to provide any other type of help and advice – but it is also useful to keep a note of sources of help and support that learners can be referred to if necessary – e.g. local advice centres, social welfare organisations etc.

ECVET/Europass

WELCOME has aligned its work to the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training [ECVET](#) and we encourage learners to use the EUROPASS language passport self-assessment [tools](#) when they are ready.

Cultural awareness

Learning or facilitating a language always entails some aspects, even if unspoken, of cultural awareness and differentiation.

It is important to remember that culture is acquired behaviour, not instinctive behaviour. All people gradually acquire the culture of their community and country throughout their lives. Hofstede suggests there are different “levels of culture, each one deeper and less conscious than the others, and each requiring different tools to be uncovered”.

Level of culture	How it manifests	Evidence
Artefacts and behaviour	Tradition, clothing, customs	Observation
Beliefs and values	Beliefs about how the world should be	Interview and survey
Assumptions	Often unspoken or unconscious	Inference and interpretation

Language education for adults has always required cultural awareness because it addresses all sorts of topics and discussions, not just language acquisition and grammar.

In your Language Clubs you will show cultural awareness by engaging with your learners and using resources that discuss the cultural context of the UK where they are learning English.

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Activity - Culture quotes

Use some of the following quotes about culture as the starting point for a group discussion:

“All people are the same. It’s only their habits that are so different.” **Confucius**

“Culture is the learned behaviour of a society or a subgroup.” **Margaret Mead**

“Once you are aware of your own mental models and cultural predispositions, and once you can respect and understand that those of another culture are legitimately different, then it becomes possible to reconcile these differences.” **Trompenaars**

“Culture is the ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves.” **Clifford Geetz**

“What we can do is to raise awareness of cultural factors. In so doing we shall aim to sharpen observation, encourage critical thinking about cultural stereotypes, and develop tolerance. These are educational issues which reach out beyond mere language teaching. Cultural awareness raising is an aspect of values education... transcending the often narrow limits of language teaching.” **Alan Maley**

Register your club and join the WELCOME network

You can register your club on the WELCOME website if you choose and will get access to our simple online initial and progress assessment tools.